CONSERVATION Showcase

A Story Inside An EWP Story

Contributors: Louis King and Don Ashby

Imagine a bustling summer camp in the tall pines with bunkhouses, challenge courses, a cookhouse, a couple of hundred campers, and a sleepy little mountain creek near where the kids are sleeping in the bunkhouses.

Now imagine that same little creek trying to carry the runoff generated from a huge wildfire above the campground after a hard summer rain, and you have the real life scenario that members of the Trigo Fire Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) team were faced with. Knowing that the sleepy little stream could turn into a roaring monster motivated Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) employees, with permission from the owners of the camp, to develop a plan to protect the structures and possible lives of campers in the bunkhouses.

The Trigo Fire began April 15, 2008, and burned 21 square miles and 59 homes in New Mexico's Manzano Mountains. This human-caused fire was visible from Albuquerque, and resulted in imminent hazards to life and property – particularly because New Mexico's monsoon season that typically starts in July is notorious for heavy thunderstorms and flash floods.

The work of the NRCS EWP team began on April 23 and with 16 Damage Survey Reports (DSRs), many accomplishments can be seen on the ground. Under the EWP program the threat to life and property was assessed and planning, design, and implementation of projects were identified and funded to reduce the potential for further disaster. The NRCS crew and contractors were busy throughout the summer, with most of the projects being funded and completed. Their efforts addressed the threat to life and property by protecting homes, cabins, bridges, roads, historic acequia, and associated watersheds.

KOAT-TV filming a Trigo fire area

And, the sleepy little stream above the summer camp?

Through diligent planning, emergency structures such as trash racks, rock filled gabion baskets, sediment basin construction, and stream channel clearing provided the little stream the capability to handle large flows of water and still protect the structures nearby.

Camp manager Randy Simmons became a firm believer after the first rain event, and subsequent rains that generated the largest flows he had seen there.

Now, because of EWP, the campers can sleep well in the bunkhouses … even if it does rain.

NRCS
Natural Resources Conservation Service